

NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE

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A 'limited hangout' on El Salvador

There is an investigation underway in Washington to disclose who in the State Department knew what, when, about human rights violations during El Salvador's civil war and to determine whether diplomats lied to Congress to hide what they knew. To date the Defense Department and the CIA, far more closely involved in the Salvadoran war, have been exempt from scrutiny.

Through advisers with field units and at headquarters, the Pentagon not only trained the Salvadoran military but largely directed the war. CIA agents were so omnipresent at the Salvadoran Directorate of National Intelligence during a 1989 guerrilla offensive that one embassy official told a reporter that attacks on the facility were a clear sign the guerrillas were "going after Americans."

The National Security Archives, a nonprofit research institute that uses the Freedom of Information Act to get government documents declassified, recently obtained listings of Salvadoran graduates from the US Army's training institute, the School of the Americas. The institute had graduates in on

the planning or execution of almost every major massacre. For example, of the 46 Salvadoran officers cited by the UN-sponsored Truth Commission for the 1989 Jesuit massacre, 27 were alumni of the School of the Americas. The school scored three for three in the 1981 Sheraton Hotel murders, three for five in the 1980 murder of four US churchwomen and two for three in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Under the dual reporting system in embassies, the only information forwarded to the State Department comes in cables from the ambassador. Most military information travels up a separate pipeline, bypassing the diplomats. An ambassador usually knows no more about military and intelligence matters than the military group commander and the military attache tell him.

President Clinton should order CIA and Pentagon files on El Salvador declassified. The Cold War having ended, there is no "national security" imperative justifying a continued coverup.